

NOTES ON THE DESTRUCTION OF BANDED EVENING GROSBEAKS IN QUEBEC IN 1960¹

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DURING June, July, and August 1959, a total of 94 Evening Grosbeaks (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) were collected in the area about St. Leon le Grande, Rimouski County, Quebec. The statistical data concerning this group as determined from the band numbers removed from the birds were previously reported (Shaub, 1960). After this first episode of wanton shooting, we were of the opinion that such molestations of these fine birds would cease, especially after one or more of the collectors had been reprimanded and fined by the Quebec law enforcement officers. However, early in 1960, we received from the Fish and Wildlife Service another batch of recovery reports, on which data concerning 104 Evening Grosbeaks were detailed, which showed that the collecting activities in the western part of the Gaspé Peninsula had been resumed in June and July 1960.

We decided at that time to make a visit during the latter part of June or early July, obtain a first-hand impression of the area and the layout, and see and study the facilities where the collecting had been carried on by the natives.

On 13 July 1961, we arrived at St. Leon le Grande, and were directed to Mr. Brousseau's residence near Lac Humqui. There we were told that Mr. Brousseau was then at his camp along the West Branch of the Patapedia River, where he is employed as a guard by lessees of fishing rights on the river, which is famous for its Atlantic salmon. As the cabin was nearly 40 miles back in the forest and the roads were scarcely passable for an automobile, we obtained the services of a guide. A new highway is being constructed into this wilderness area, which in due time will emerge at the northeast corner of Maine, to enable motor vehicles to carry out lumber, and to provide a short route to the north shore of the peninsula for tourists and sportsmen. Both the unfinished new road and the old road were extremely rough, but our heavy station wagon negotiated these without incident. The camp is located in the forest with only very small areas of open land.

During our conversation with our host we learned that the American fisherman who precipitated the grosbeak shooting spree in 1959 had told him that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service would pay one dollar for every bird band returned to that office. Mr. Brousseau told us he thought that his "fortune was about to be made"; hence, he and a number of other

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individuals deliberately shot all the banded birds they could during the summer of 1959.

Regarding the collecting of the 104 birds in 1960, Mr. Brousseau said that he had not taken any of this lot, and that all of the bands had been given to him to send to Washington. He is one of the very few Frenchmen in the area who can speak and write English. When asked how the birds were collected, he said that he could "only surmise." Our surmise is that they were shot with a .22 caliber rifle when they visited the several cabins along the river for salt sprinkled on the ground nearby.

The area along the Patapedia River is densely forested, chiefly with spruce and balsam. The stand of trees is usually so dense that it is difficult to traverse the area on foot or by any other means; hence, one would have to spend a great deal of energy trying to search out the nesting sites of the grosbeaks. Our host said he had, at one time, found a nest, and that it was located near the top of one of the rather slender springy conifers.

The next morning we were up at daylight and in the cabin. It was not long before the birds began to come in to the bare area of a couple of square yards near the entrance, just off the large flat stone before the door. Ordinary fine-grained table salt had been sprinkled from a saltcellar and it was for this that

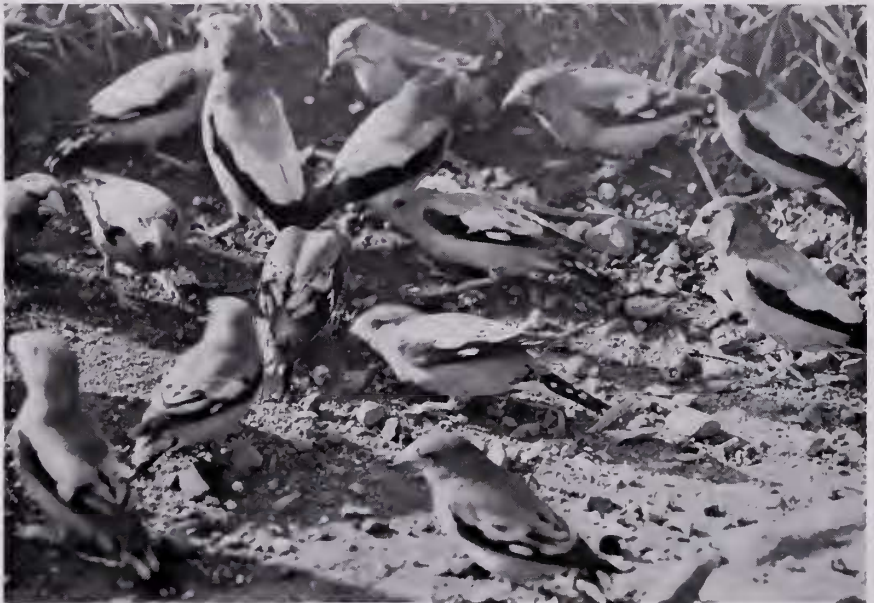


FIG. 1. Group of 15 Evening Grosbeaks photographed early in the morning of 14 July at Brousseau's cabin on the West Branch of the Patapedia River. Birds are picking up minute grains of table salt from the bare ground.

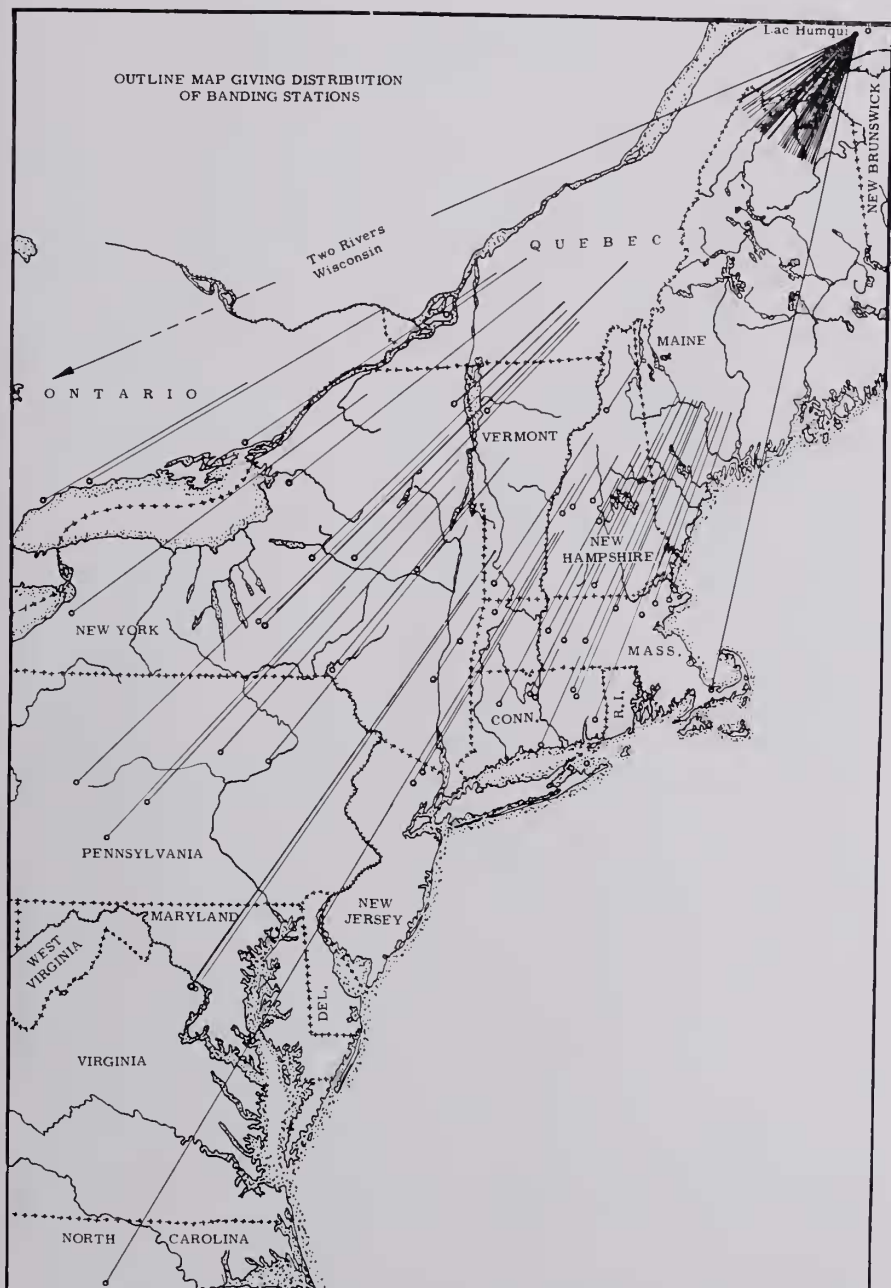


FIG. 2. Map showing site of Lac Humqui, Quebec and the location of the banding stations where the collected Evening Grosbeaks were banded.

the birds came to the area in large numbers. One could sit in the doorway and observe the relatively tame birds while they were picking up the salt, and see easily if a bird was banded. It would have been equally easy to collect the bird with a .22 caliber rifle. The photograph (Fig. 1), taken under adverse conditions, shows 15 grosbeaks in an area not more than 2 feet square. Of the birds in the picture only a third are males, while, of those collected, 71 were males and 33 were females. Other birds that came to this spot while we were present, and not more than 7 feet from the doorsill, were Purple Finches (*Carpodacus purpureus*), American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*), and Tree Swallows (*Iridoprocne bicolor*). It is surprising how attentively they will pick up the very small individual grains of salt. This scene was reported to be similar to those at the other places where the two lots of Evening Grosbeaks were collected.

With the data at hand for another group of Evening Grosbeaks during their breeding season, it seems desirable to use the information provided by the sample for a better knowledge of these birds on the Gaspé.

Figure 2 shows the wintering area where the 1960 birds were banded. Since the Middle Atlantic and the New England states account for the great majority of the Evening Grosbeaks banded, similar samples from other areas where the species breeds in numbers might well show a similar distribution.

Figure 3 shows the interval over which the birds were collected and is principally a record of the activities of the collectors.

In Figure 4 we have a rather striking survival chart. To be of the greatest value, such a chart should pertain to a situation where approximately the same number of birds were banded every year, but this would depend largely

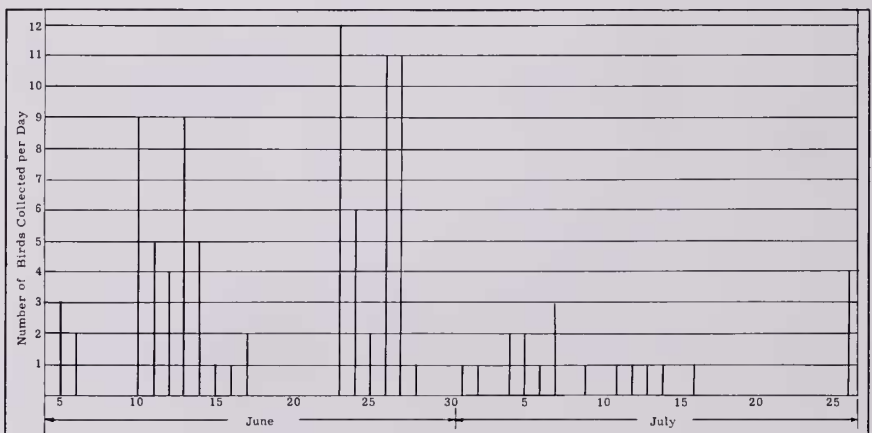


FIG. 3. Diagram showing date and number of Evening Grosbeaks collected from 5 June to 26 July 1960 in the vicinity of Lac Humqui and the Patapedia River area.

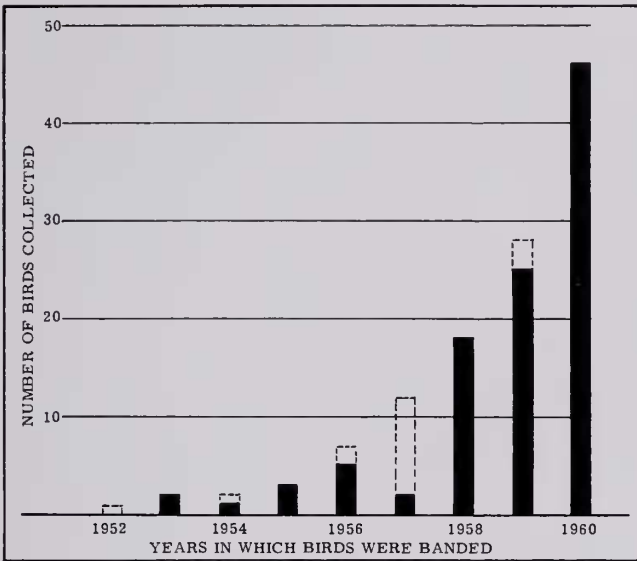


FIG. 4. A survival chart showing the number of birds in the sample plotted against the year they were banded.

upon chance, or upon the concerted action of a large number of people. The banding records show that a much smaller number of individuals of the species were banded in 1957 than in other years, and this shows up clearly in the diagram. The added height of the column (dotted) shows approximately the number of birds banded in 1957 that might have been in the lot. The same situation, to a lesser degree, may pertain to several of the other years. Should one have the opportunity to trap a sufficiently large sample of birds which have been banded each year in equal numbers, over a period longer than the age of the oldest member of the species, and which have become thoroughly mixed after banding (as is the case of the Evening Grosbeak), he would have an excellent set of figures for determining, by extrapolation of the data, the maximum age any individual is likely to reach. For the Evening Grosbeak an age of 10 to 12 years would be the maximum.

The high rate of mortality for the first 2 years is also shown in the diagram, for birds in their adult plumage when banded. With such a high rate of mortality for adults, the rate for fledglings must be astonishingly high for the first five months after leaving the nest.

While one might assume that most of the birds, in their spring migration, journey to the western part of the Gaspé, New Brunswick, and the northeastern part of Maine for their breeding period, nevertheless if one had a sample of

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF LOCALITIES AND BANDERS, AND OF THE NUMBER
OF BIRDS TAKEN, IN 1959 AND 1960

State or Province	Number of localities		Number of banders		Number of birds	
	1959	1960	1959	1960	1959	1960
Connecticut	5	7	6	7	10	11
Maine	3	1	3	1	4	2
Massachusetts	9	9	11	11	21	16
Michigan	2	0	2	0	2	0
New Hampshire	7	6	7	6	11	6
New Jersey	1	2	1	2	1	2
New York	7	11	7	12	18	32
North Carolina	0	1	0	1	0	1
Ontario	2	4	2	4	2	4
Pennsylvania	6	5	6	5	14	18
Quebec	0	1	0	1	0	1
Rhode Island	1	0	1	0	1	0
Vermont	5	2	6	3	9	6
Virginia	1	2	1	1	1	4
Wisconsin	0	1	0	1	0	1
Totals	49	52	53	55	94	104

the nesting population in the other breeding areas in the eastern part of North America there would probably be a like assemblage of the wintering birds from the same banding area.

Of the 49 banding stations listed in the data for 1959 (see Table 1), 24 stations were not represented in the 1960 reports: 25 stations were listed at both times; 27 stations were added by the new reports. In all, for the two sets of data, 76 stations had banded one or more Evening Grosbeaks which were collected in the Lac Humqui and the Patapedia River areas.

Birds (numbers in parentheses) were listed in the 1960 reports from the following localities: *Connecticut*: Bloomfield (2); Guilford (1); Hartford (3); Ledyard (1); Mansfield (1); Morris (2); Storrs (1). *Maine*: Cumberland Mills (1). *Massachusetts*: Adams (3); Amherst (1); Groton (1); Lexington (2); Paxton (1); Reading (1); Sandwich (1); South Hamilton (1); Ware (5). *New Hampshire*: Bedford (1); Enfield (1); Franklin (1); Lancaster (1); Mascoma (1); New Hampton (1). *New Jersey*: Pompton (1); Ramsey (1). *New York*: Amsterdam (2); Deposit (7); East Chatham (3); Etna (2); Hamburg (3); Herkimer (1); Kingston (1); Oneida (1); Peru (2); Slaterville Springs (1); Watertown (9). *North Carolina*: Rocky Mount (1). *Ontario*: Barriefield (1); Bowmanville (1); Cherrywood (1); Toronto (1). *Pennsylvania*: Berwick (1); Hollidaysburg (2); Proctor (3); State College (10); Sykesville (2). *Quebec*: Montreal (1). *Vermont*: Bennington (2); Burlington (4). *Virginia*: Arlington (1); Dun Loring (3). *Wisconsin*: Two Rivers (1).

The presence of so many Evening Grosbeaks in this remote area during the nesting season offers a superb opportunity for vacationing bird banders to

spend a fortnight or longer banding these birds (see Parks and Parks, 1963). At the same time they could excite an interest among the natives in trapping and banding the birds rather than collecting the banded individuals. It appears from conversations with men in the area that there is a strong tendency to secure the bands in order to learn where the birds were banded and by whom. The same and much additional information would be available to those who would band the birds, and release them, for they would often be trapped by the many banders in the wintering territory. Such a program of banding would add much to our present knowledge.

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159 ELM STREET, NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 23 JANUARY 1963

NEW LIFE MEMBER



Dr. Mary Juhn (Mrs. Richard M. Fraps), a member of the WOS since 1954, has recently become a Life Member of the Society. The holder of a Ph.D. from the University of Zurich, Dr. Juhn has retired from a professional position involving ornithological research principally dealing with feather development as reflecting aspects of avian endocrinology and general development. She is a member of the AOU, American Society of Zoologists, American Association of Anatomists, Society of Biology and Medicine, American Genetic Association, Sigma Xi, and a Fellow of the AAAS. Her current interests include gardening and conservation.